

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: February 13, 2019

Agenda Item: White Tail Deer Season Changes to Buck Only in HD 122 and 130

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 20 Minutes

Background: FWP proposes to change the white-tailed deer regulations in HDs 122 and 130 to antlered-buck-only during the general season, based on public input. The proposal would change the white-tailed deer general season regulations from first week either-sex district-wide and last week either-sex on private land to antlered-buck-only for the entire season. FWP is proposing this change outside of the regular biennial cycle because of significant public input asking for change before the 2020-2021 biennium. Justifications are in the commission packet.

The previous two winters have been long and hard with deep snow and cold temperatures that have resulted in below-average fawn recruitment. Hunters have expressed concerns about the number of deer and the lack of adult bucks in HD 122. Buck harvest there decreased 10% in 2017, and a further decline is expected to be seen when 2018 harvest results are available. The total number of HD 122 white-tailed deer checked at the Highway 2 Check Station west of Kalispell was down almost 50% this past season. In addition, the percentage of bucks from HD 122 vs. total bucks dropped from 19% in 2017, to 15% in 2018.

The objective in HD 130 is to reduce harvest of adult does to increase recruitment. Observed fawn recruitment, i.e. fawns living through their first winter, decreased from 53 fawns per 100 adults in 2016 to 25 fawns per 100 adults in 2018. The last two year's recruitment suggests a declining population. Furthermore, the 2018 survey indicated a decline in total population numbers. During the 2018 hunting season, the number of antlered bucks checked at the Swan Valley Check Station was dramatically less than in previous years. Most of HD 130 is public land with excellent hunter access. Winter severity has a significant impact on white-tailed deer in this area, which receives regular deep snows and cold temperatures. Predator density further impacts deer recruitment.

Rationale for individual proposals may be further articulated at the Feb. 13 commission meeting.

Public Involvement Process & Results: This proposal has not received public comment outside the region. FWP regional staff recently hosted meetings in Kalispell, Libby, Trout Creek, and Eureka and presented information about deer population trends and harvest data and discussed deer management with sportsmen. Combined, these meetings totaled nearly 150 people who generally expressed support for the antlered-buck-only proposal. Other public comment may be taken at the Feb. 13 commission meeting.

Alternatives and Analysis: Proposals may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions, or no change from 2018 (status quo). No change would challenge the supporting justifications behind proposals.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends the commission adopt the 2019 white-tailed deer hunting regulations for antlered-buck-only during the general season for hunting districts 122 and 130 as presented by FWP.

Proposed Motion:

I move the commission adopt the 2019 white-tailed deer hunting regulations for antlered-buck-only during the general season for hunting districts 122 and 130 as presented by FWP, and that all other aspects of the deer season remain unchanged unless addressed in other proposals.